

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BAGHDA 00465 040844Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 VO-05 HA-05 INSE-00 CIAE-00
FBIE-00 NSAE-00 CA-01 TRSE-00 SS-15 NSC-05 /054 W
-----115088 050020Z /62
R 040717Z MAR 78
FM USINT BAGHDAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5774
INFO AMEMBASSY ATHENS

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 0465

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: CVIS, SHUM, SREF, IZ
SUBJECT: IRAQI CHRISTIANS

REF: STATE 48749

1. REFTEL REQUESTS OUR VIEWS ON WHETHER 34 IRAQI
CHRISTIANS CURRENTLY SEEKING ASYLUM IN THE U.S. HAVE
REASONABLE GROUNDS TO FEAR PERSECUTION IF THEY RETURN
TO IRAQ. IN OUR CONSIDERED JUDGMENT, THE SHORT ANSWER
IS NO.

2. THE GOI HAS ALREADY REVEALED DEEP SENSITIVITY TO
CHARGES OF PERSECUTION AND THE OVERRIDING CONCERN, AS FAR
AS WE CAN READ IT, IS TO AVOID ANY FURTHER ADVERSE
PUBLICITY. IF THE 34 WERE TO RETURN HERE, WE BELIEVE
THAT THERE ARE A NUMBER OF FACTORS THAT WOULD MILITATE
AGAINST THEIR BEING MISTREATED:

(A) MOST OBSERVERS AGREE THAT THERE IS NO BASIS
FOR A CLAIM OF RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION. IN THIS
FACET OF ITS INTERNAL POLICIES, IRAQ HAS BEEN
SUCCESSFUL IN OVERCOMING THE PROBLEMS OF PAST
ADMINISTRATIONS.

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(B) AN ANNOUNCED POLICY OF AMNESTY FOR DISSIDENTS
OUTSIDE IRAQ AND A PUBLIC PROGRAM OF ENCOURAGING
THE RETURN OF EMIGRES ARE IN EFFECT PROVIDING
A MECHANISM FOR HANDLING RETURNEES.

(C) THE GOI'S RECENT DIPLOMATIC CAMPAIGN FOR
SEATS IN UN HUMAN RIGHTS ENTITIES WILL ACT

TO FURTHER HEIGHTEN CONCERN OVER THE INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC IMAGE OF THE REGIME.

3. PROBLEMS CAUSED BY THE POSSIBILITY THAT THEY HAVE GIVEN UP SOME OF THEIR FORMER POSSESSIONS WOULD COMPLICATE THEIR LIVES PERHAPS, BUT INsofar AS THE GOVERNMENT IS CONCERNED WE DOUBT THEY WOULD HAVE ANYTHING TO FEAR. THE ATTITUDE OF SOME COUNTRYMEN, INCLUDING OTHER CHRISTIANS WHO MIGHT FEEL THAT THEIR OWN SITUATIONS HAD BEEN ADVERSELY AFFECTED, IS MORE DIFFICULT TO GAUGE, BUT ON BALANCE WE THINK THERE WOULD NOT BE ANY MAJOR PROBLEMS.

4. WE NOTE FROM REFTTEL A PRESUMPTION THAT THEY WOULD RETURN TO IRAQ IF CONDITIONAL ENTRY TO THE US WERE TO BE DENIED. IF IT IS NOT OUR INTENTION TO FORCE THEM TO COME HERE, IT IS NOT CERTAIN THEY WOULD DO IT ON THEIR OWN. IF WE RETURN THEM TO ATHENS, FROM WHENCE THEY STARTED THE LAST LEG OF THE JOURNEY, IRAQ MIGHT NOT BE THE LOGICAL CHOICE FOR THEIR ONWARD DESTINATION. ALL OBSERVERS SEEM TO AGREE THAT THEY LEFT IRAQ TO BETTER THEIR ECONOMIC PROSPECTS, USING ALLEGATIONS OF PERSECUTION AS THE MEANS FOR OBTAINING ENTRY TO THE US. IF THAT FAILS, THEY WILL GO ELSEWHERE BUT NOT RETURN HERE, AND FOR THE SAME REASONS.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CHRISTIANS, POLITICAL REPRESSION, POLITICAL ASYLUM, INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 04 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978BAGHDA00465
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780099-1053
Format: TEL
From: BAGHDAD
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t197803106/aaaadmlw.tel
Line Count: 94
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 30507bb8-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 STATE 48749
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 26 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3117465
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: IRAQI CHRISTIANS
TAGS: CVIS, SHUM, SREF, IZ, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/30507bb8-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014